

THE POLITICS OF HAZING: AN EXAMINATION OF HAZING MOTIVATION, MORAL FOUNDATIONS, AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

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Research in moral psychology suggests that political ideology may influence attitudes about hazing in college fraternities. Moral foundations theory (Haidt & Joseph, 2004) provides a valuable framework to help understand the connection between political ideology and hazing motivation. In this study, we examine the connection between political ideology and hazing motivation. Results show significant correlations between political conservatism and social dominance and loyalty/commitment hazing motivations, providing additional validation of the principal tenets of moral foundations theory.

Keywords: hazing, political ideology, moral development

Research in moral psychology has found strong evidence that political ideology predicts moral judgments. (Jost, 2006; Haidt & Graham, 2007). Moral foundations theory (Haidt & Joseph, 2004) examines moral differences across cultures and offers five psychological foundations for morality: Harm/care, Fairness/reciprocity, Ingroup/loyalty, Authority/respect, and Purity/Sanctity. A series of studies have found that political liberals place the most emphasis on two of these foundations – basing their moral judgments on questions of Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity while generally ignoring the other foundations. Political conservatives place slightly less emphasis on issues of Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity. However, they still use these foundations in their decision-making and are more likely to prioritize the foundations of Ingroup/loyalty, Authority/respect, and Purity/sanctity in making moral judgments (Graham et al., 2009).

The moral foundations of Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity are generally considered an *individualizing* approach to morality. The individualizing approach places individual responsibility at the center of moral value. On the other hand, the moral foundations of Ingroup/loyalty and Authority/respect represent a *binding* approach to morality – using groups and institutions to suppress selfishness and encourage moral behavior (Graham et al., 2009). Virtues such as loyalty, respect for elders, and sacrificing on behalf of the group are best thought of through the lens of coalitional psychology (Kurzban et al., 2001). In general, political liberals tend to prioritize individual liberty and freedom and appeal to altruism to shape moral behavior. In contrast, political conservatives rely more heavily on coalitional psychology to suppress selfishness and free-riding and to promote altruistic behavior (Graham et al., 2009).

In examining this coalitional psychology, Cimino (2011) argued that hazing is an adaptive response to suppressing selfishness and preventing free-riding specifically among newcomers to enduring coalitions. Cimino demonstrated that hazing severity is predicted by the perceived automatic benefits associated with group membership. Members of groups with significant automatic benefits (social status, shared property, group protection, etc.) construct more severe initiations than members of groups lacking these automatic benefits. Hazing, based on Cimino's Automatic Accrual Theory, is designed to prevent newcomers from exploiting these automatic benefits. Cimino argues that Automatic Accrual Theory represents an intrinsic motivation not generally articulated by hazers. He advances three macro-theories related to the stated motivations for hazing. First solidarity, or the idea that enduring hazing builds solidarity among group members. Next, dominance, or the idea that hazing reinforces group hierarchy and teaches newcomers respect and obedience to authority. Lastly, commitment, or the idea that enduring hazing, is an act of demonstrating one's loyalty to the group (Cimino, 2011).

McCreary and Schutts (2019) extended Cimino's (2011) research in their construction of the Hazing Motivation Scale. The scale measures four stated motivations for hazing, including the three offered by Cimino (unity/solidarity, dominance, and loyalty/commitment), as well as a motivation related to teaching/reinforcing group-relevant skills and knowledge (Keating et al., 2005). Their study of American college fraternity members resulted in a four-factor model that demonstrates good model fit and explains 74 percent of the variation in hazing motivation. Two hazing motivations suggested by Cimino (2011) and studied by McCreary and Schutts (2019) are conceptually aligned with conservative moral foundations. Social dominance hazing is conceptually aligned with the moral foundation of Authority/respect (Hazing designed to teach newcomers to be subservient and show deference and respect to group elders and reverence for group traditions). The loyalty/commitment motivation is conceptually aligned with the moral foundation of Ingroup/loyalty (Hazing is designed to reinforce loyalty to the group and to weed out those newcomers who are not fully committed to the group).

Moral Foundations Theory

Traditional western views related to morality have, for decades, placed the protection of the individual at the center of moral psychology (Kohlberg, 1969; Gilligan, 1982; Turiel, 1983). This limited view of morality focuses primarily on how individuals treat one another, emphasizing issues of harm and fairness. Shweder et al. (1997), expanding beyond traditional Western definitions, found that cultures in countries such as India and Brazil moralize issues that do not involve harm to other persons. They proposed that morality in other cultures may also involve an "ethic of community" that moralizes issues such as duty, obedience to authority, and group cohesion, as well as an "ethic of divinity" that moralizes issues such as purity and sanctity.

Haidt and Joseph (2004) expanded on this work by studying virtues from various cultures and eras, taxonomies of morality from anthropology, and evolutionary theories about human and primate sociality, looking for cases of virtues found across cultures for which there were no plausible evolutionary or psychological explanations. That research identified five candidates for the five human moral foundations. Two of those foundations aligned with the traditional Western, individualist views of morality. First, the Harm/care foundation relates to caring for the vulnerable and doing no harm to others. Secondly, the Fairness/reciprocity foundation relates to the “ethic of justice” studied by Kohlberg (1969) and relates to the evolutionary process of reciprocal altruism and ideas of justice, rights, and autonomy (Haidt & Joseph, 2004).

The remaining three foundations are more closely aligned with the “ethic of community” and the “ethic of divinity” advanced by Shweder and his colleagues (1997). The Ingroup/loyalty foundation, related to our tribal history and the need to form coalitions, emphasizes group sacrifice, patriotism, and loyalty to members of one’s group. The Authority/respect foundation underlies virtues of leadership and followership and emphasizes deference to authority and respect for group traditions. Lastly, the Purity/sanctity foundation is shaped by the psychology of disgust and underlies religious notions of suppressing desire, treating the body as a temple, and avoiding contaminants. (Haidt & Joseph, 2004).

Studies of Moral Foundations Theory have consistently found that self-described political ideology predicts moral judgments related to the five foundations (Graham et al., 2009; Koleva et al., 2012). Specifically, political liberals view most moral issues through the lens of Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity while generally ignoring the binding foundations of Ingroup/loyalty, Authority/respect, and Purity/sanctity. Political conservatives, on the other hand, view moral issues through the lens of all five foundations. Conservatives score slightly lower than liberals regarding the emphasis placed on issues of Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity but still view these foundations as important. However, conservatives are much more concerned than liberals about issues related to Ingroup, Authority, and Purity (Graham et al., 2009).

Hazing Motivation Theory

While a number of hazing definitions exist, the one that most closely aligns with the framework of this study is the definition advanced by Cimino (2017), who defined hazing as:

Any non-accidental, costly aspects of group induction activities that: (a) do not appear to be group-relevant assessments/preparations, or (b) appear excessive in nature. Group induction activities are those tasks formally or informally required to obtain membership or participatory legitimacy for new or prospective members (p. 135).

While several researchers have offered theories on the motivation of hazing, the most thoroughly researched and empirically validated theory of hazing motivation is the Automatic Accrual Theory advanced by Cimino (2011). Automatic Accrual Theory suggests that hazing is an adaptive response to prevent group newcomers from exploiting the automatic benefits of group membership. While the theory is grounded in a lengthy review of research in cultural anthropology, the theory is also empirically validated. Cimino's (2011) empirical studies demonstrate clear relationships between perceptions of automatically accrued benefits to group newcomers and the severity of initiation that is proscribed for those groups.

Cimino argues that Automatic Accrual Theory represents an implicit motivation, and advances three macro-theories to explain explicit, or stated, hazing motivation. The Solidarity macro-theory involves hazing motivated by promoting group bonding through shared hardship. The Dominance macro-theory involves hazing motivated by reinforcing group hierarchy through mechanisms of power and control. The Commitment macro-theory involves hazing motivated by having newcomers demonstrate their commitment to the group and to weed out those who are not committed.

McCreary and Schutts (2019) expanded the work of Cimino (2011) in developing the Hazing Motivation Scale. The questionnaire measures the motivations of group members related to Unity/Solidarity, Loyalty/Commitment, and Dominance motivations outlined by Cimino (2011) and an educational motivation outlined by Keating and colleagues (2005). In a study of nearly 3,000 fraternity members at college campuses across the United States, their four-factor model explained 74 percent of the variance in explicit hazing motivation. Their research found that the two most problematic motivations, in terms of correlations with hazing tolerance, conformity, and moral disengagement, were the dominance motivation and the loyalty/commitment motivation. Consequently, these two motivations are the most conceptually aligned with the moral foundations of In-group/loyalty and Authority/respect.

Previous research has also shown an inverse relationship between the individualist moral foundations of Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity and support of hazing. McCreary et al. (2016) found that individualist moral judgment, as measured by the Defining Issues Test II (Rest et al., 1999; Thomas, 2006), is inversely correlated with hazing-supportive attitudes and mediates the relationship between hazing-supportive attitudes and moral disengagement. This research would suggest that political liberals, who place a higher priority on issues of Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity, would be less supportive of hazing generally and would be less motivated by the binding motivations of group loyalty and obedience to authority.

Purpose and Hypotheses

The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the relationship

between political ideology and hazing motivation using a cross-sectional survey methodology. Thus far, we have provided theoretical/conceptual rationale for expected relationships between political ideology and moral foundations, hazing motivations and tolerance, the importance of social status, unethical pro-organizational behavior, and moral disengagement. Based on the interrelationship among the frameworks, our study was guided and proposed to test two hypotheses:

- H1:** Politically conservative fraternity members will express tolerance for more severe forms of hazing compared to moderate or liberal members.
- H2:** Politically conservative fraternity members will be more motivated than liberal or moderate fraternity members to participate in hazing activities that are conceptually aligned to the binding moral foundations – specifically social dominance and loyalty/commitment.

Method

This section includes the quantitative methodology and methods used for data collection and analysis to answer research questions. Following the summary of participants and the research design, we introduce the specific measures used and the quantitative tests performed.

Participants and Design

Undergraduate fraternity members ($N = 73,920$) from 449 colleges and universities throughout the U.S. were given an opportunity to complete a voluntary online questionnaire from spring 2019 to spring 2021. All study procedures were reviewed and approved by key decision-makers at each respective fraternity headquarters. These individuals provided the researchers with contact information for their entire membership. All fraternities and sororities surveyed are (or were at one time) members of the North American Interfraternity Conference.

We employed a quantitative design using cross-sectional survey research methods to determine the nature of the relationships among the study variables. G*Power (version 3.1.9.2) indicated that the minimum sample size needed to ensure adequate power (.80) given a Type I error probability of .05 and a potential small effect size (.10) was 779. The sampling methodology for this study was a census approach of all members presently on the undergraduate rolls of their respective fraternities. The sampling frame was refined to include only those members with valid email addresses. The design and methodology do not permit assertions of causation or changes that occur over time (Creswell, 2012).

The overall survey response rate was 50% ($n = 37,076$). The dataset

was comprised of eight inter/national fraternities across 449 campuses in the U.S. and Canada. Most respondents (72%) came from public institutions and classified as 18% freshmen, 30% sophomores, 29% juniors, and 23% seniors; 14% first-generation college students; 14% were legacies; Slightly more than half (53%) of respondents were general members of their fraternity, and an additional 29% held a leadership position on their chapter's executive board. By race, respondents were 76% White, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% Black/African American, 8% Hispanic/Latinx, 4% Multi-Racial, and 5% Other. Respondent demographics reflected the underlying population of members in the fraternities studied.

Measures

The measures selected for this study were drawn from the relevant literature and aligned with the study goals. In one instance, we developed a single-item measure for the explicit purpose of evaluating one's political ideology. All the measures demonstrated sufficient internal consistency reliability and were appropriately measured for statistical tests performed.

Political ideology

The single-item measure assessed self-reported political ideology. The scale was coded as follows: 1 *very liberal*, 2 *liberal*, 3 *moderate*, 4 *conservative*, and 5 *very conservative*.

Hazing motivations.

The 20-item Hazing Motivations Scale (McCreary & Schutts, 2019) assessed the underlying motivations, goals, or philosophies of the chapter's new member education program. The scale is comprised of four constructs: instrumental education (teaching valuable lessons), unity/solidarity (bonding the new member group), loyalty/commitment (instilling a sense of organizational devotion and allegiance), and social dominance (reinforcing the "initiated" member versus "pledge/new" member social hierarchy). The scale was measured using Likert-type response options, with 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*. In this sample, the scale had acceptable internal consistency reliability overall ($\alpha = .89$), and by subscale: Instrumental education (.94), Unity/solidarity (.90), Loyalty/commitment (.84), Social dominance (.89).

Hazing tolerance

The single item measure from McCreary & Schutts (2020) assessed at which point an individual would quit their new member education program if they were required to engage in a specific behavior. The scale ranges from 1 (I would not perform anything on this list) to 14 (I would perform anything on this list). The items are presented in a list that becomes increasingly more egregious.

Social status importance

The 5-item measure from McCreary & Schutts (2020) assessed the importance an individual places on the status ascribed to them in

their social environment because of membership in their respective fraternity. The scale was measured using Likert-type response options, with 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*. In this sample, the scale had acceptable internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .69$).

Moral disengagement

The 8-item Propensity to Morally Disengage scale from Moore et al. (2012) assessed one's propensity to use cognitive mechanisms to deactivate their moral self-regulatory processes. The scale was measured using Likert-type response options, with 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*. In this sample, the scale had acceptable internal consistency reliability overall ($\alpha = .92$).

Unethical pro-organizational behavior

The 5-item measure from Umphress et al. (2010) assessed one's propensity to commit unethical behaviors to benefit their chapter potentially. The scale was measured using Likert-type response options, with 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*. In this sample, the scale had acceptable internal consistency reliability overall ($\alpha = .90$).

Analysis plan

We screened the data in SPSS (version 27) for potential outliers, data coding errors, or records with significant amounts of missing information and removed 5,695 records that were missing political ideology responses, leaving 31,381 responses for analysis (response rate of valid records = 42%). Next, we generated demographic statistics.

We then proceeded to test the assumptions of correlation analysis and analysis of variance using the guidance from Knapp (2018). Assumptions for normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were assessed and found to hold. We then conducted a bivariate Pearson's correlation analysis to determine the nature of the relationship among political ideology and the several study variables.

The appropriate way to test for differences among means given a categorical independent variable is using an analysis of variance design. Our initial goal was to conduct a multivariate analysis of variance. However, each fraternity measured some combination of the study variables (but not all). Because of that, we conducted a series of analyses of variance, treating political ideology as the independent variable and the other study variables, respectively, as dependent variables. Analysis of variance results are presented with their overall test statistic and significance value. To control for family-wise error, we used the Bonferroni-Holm correction to significance level (Holm, 1979). If the overall test was statistically significant, planned contrast procedures and post hoc analyses were conducted to determine the nature of the difference among the different levels of political ideology. Results of planned contrasts are presented with their respective significance value from the underlying *t*-test and the average *r*-contrast

(r_c) as the measure of effect size (see Field, 2018).

The mean scores for each variable across each level of political ideology are presented with bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals and their respective standard errors. Field (2018) notes that bootstrapping is a robust method to mitigate potential issues/biases arising from outlier scores or violations of statistical test assumptions. The technique estimates sampling distribution of a statistic is estimated by taking multiple random samples from the data set, thereby treating the dataset as a population from which smaller samples are taken. In the present study, we bootstrapped 1,000 samples from the dataset.

Results

On average, the sample was politically conservative ($M = 3.22$, $SD = .96$). Categorically, the sample was 5% very liberal, 15% liberal, 42% moderate, 31% conservative, and 8% very conservative. The correlation between political ideology and the other measures of the study are presented in Table 1. All correlations were statistically significant; however, those at or above .10 reflect a small effect and have additional practical significance. The three strongest correlations were between political ideology and loyalty/commitment motivation, social dominance motivation, and unethical pro-organizational behavior. The weakest correlation was between political ideology and instrumental education.

Table 1
Correlations with political conservatism

	<i>r</i>	<i>n</i>
Loyalty/commitment motivation	.17	31,243
Social dominance motivation	.15	31,224
Unethical pro-organizational behavior	.14	9,056
Social status importance	.11	30,248
Hazing tolerance	.09	30,349
Moral disengagement	.09	6,196
Unity/solidarity motivation	.07	31,223
Instrumental education motivation	.04	31,260

Notes: All correlations significant at $p < .001$.

There were significant effects of political ideology on each of the study variables at $p < .001$. Table 2 displays the results of each ANOVA, including the findings from planned contrasts and post-hoc tests. What follows is a summary of these findings organized by research question.

Table 2

Analysis of Variance Results and Follow Up Tests

Measure	ANOVA Result	Sig.	Follow-up Result
Unethical pro-organizational behavior	F(4, 9051) = 49.30	<.001	1 < 2, 3, 4, 5 2 < 3, 4, 5 3 < 4 4 < 5
Social Status Importance	F(4, 30243) = 97.95	<.001	1 < 2, 3, 4, 5 2 < 3, 4, 5 3 < 4 4 < 5
Loyalty/Commitment Motivation	F(4, 31238) = 223.04	<.001	1 < 2, 3, 4, 5 2 < 3, 4, 5 3 < 4 4 < 5
Social Dominance Motivation	F(4, 31219) = 175.39	<.001	1 < 2, 3, 4, 5 2 < 3, 4, 5 3 < 4 4 < 5
Instrumental Education Motivation	F(4, 31255) = 24.92	<.001	1 < 2, 4, 5 2 < 3, 4 3 < 4, 5 4 < 5
Unity/Solidarity Motivation	F(4, 31218) = 54.96	<.001	1 < 2, 3, 4, 5 2 < 4, 5 3 < 4, 5
Moral Disengagement	F(4, 6191) = 17.57	<.001	1 < 3, 4, 5 2 < 3, 4, 5 3 < 5 4 < 5
Hazing Tolerance	F(4, 30344) = 61.49	<.001	1 < 2, 3, 4, 5 2 < 3, 4, 5 3 < 4, 5 4 < 5

Notes: Political ideology categories in follow up results: 1 (Very Liberal), 2 (Liberal), 3 (Moderate), 4 (Conservative), 5 (Very Conservative).

Hypothesis 1

While we found no statistically significant differences on hazing tolerance among liberal versus very liberal members, every other level differed statistically from one another ($p < .01$, $r_c = .20$). Conservative members were generally more likely to tolerate hazing behaviors than moderate, liberal, or very liberal members. In combination with the correlations presented in Table 1, these findings provide support for Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2

Contrasts revealed that each level of political ideology statistically differed from one another with respect to both loyalty/commitment motivation ($p < .001$, $r_c = .36$), and social dominance motivation ($p < .001$, $r_c = .32$)—with conservative members endorsing higher levels of each than their moderate or liberal peers. This is also evident as the bootstrapped confidence intervals of the means for each ideology did not cross over one another. The loyalty/commitment and social dominance scores also displayed less variance at the various levels of ideology as evidenced by tighter confidence intervals and smaller standard errors compared to most of the other measures in this study. This was not true for the other hazing motivations measured in this study (solidarity and instrumental education). Collectively, these findings provide strong support for Hypothesis 2.

Additional Results

Contrasts revealed that very conservative and conservative members also scored higher on moral disengagement than liberal or very liberal members. Liberal and very liberal members also were less likely to endorse moral disengagement beliefs than moderate members ($p < .05$, $r_c = .22$). Conservative members also scored significantly higher than moderate or liberal members on social status importance.

The picture for instrumental education motivation was different than any of the other measures. Contrasts revealed that very conservative members differed from moderates and very liberal members. Conservative members, however, differed from all levels except very conservative members ($p < .01$, $r_c = .06$). To clarify the general nature of the difference, we consolidated the ideological levels into three categories—liberal, moderate, and conservative—and re-ran the analysis. The differences were more pronounced, $F(4, 31255) = 41.67$, $p < .001$. Each of the three levels now showed statistical differentiation from one another with moderate members reporting the lowest beliefs ($p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$): liberals ($M = 4.27$, $SD = .01$, 95% CI [4.26–4.29]); moderates ($M = 4.25$, $SD = .01$, 95% CI [4.24–4.26]); conservatives ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .01$, 95% CI [4.31–4.34]).

Lastly, contrasts revealed that very conservative versus conservative members and liberal versus moderate members did not differ in their unity/solidarity beliefs. However, conservative members endorsed higher unity/solidarity beliefs than moderate, liberal, or very liberal members ($p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .16$). The mean scores for each measure disaggregated by political ideology are presented in Table 2.

Table 3*Mean scores by political ideology*

	<i>Very liberal</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Very Conservative</i>
Hazing tolerance	4.25 (.12) [4.01–4.50]	4.59 (.07) [4.45–4.86]	5.27 (.05) [5.18–5.36]	5.51 (.05) [5.41–5.61]	6.25 (.11) [6.05–6.47]
Instrumental education	4.22 (.02) [4.19–4.26]	4.29 (.01) [4.27–4.31]	4.25 (.01) [4.24–4.26]	4.33 (.01) [4.32–4.34]	4.30 (.01) [4.27–4.33]
Loyalty/commitment	3.22 (.02) [3.18–3.27]	3.43 (.01) [3.41–3.45]	3.55 (.01) [3.54–3.56]	3.68 (.01) [3.67–3.70]	3.78 (.02) [3.75–3.81]
Moral disengagement	1.81 (.04) [1.73–1.89]	1.89 (.02) [1.84–1.93]	1.99 (.01) [1.96–2.02]	1.98 (.02) [1.95–2.01]	2.16 (.04) [2.09–2.23]
Social dominance	2.16 (.03) [2.11–2.21]	2.30 (.01) [2.27–2.33]	2.48 (.01) [2.47–2.50]	2.60 (.01) [2.58–2.62]	2.82 (.02) [2.78–2.86]
Social status importance	3.14 (.02) [3.10–3.18]	3.25 (.01) [3.23–3.27]	3.30 (.01) [3.29–3.31]	3.40 (.01) [3.38–3.41]	3.46 (.02) [3.43–3.50]
Unethical pro-org. behavior	2.17 (.04) [2.10–2.25]	2.37 (.02) [2.32–2.41]	2.48 (.02) [2.45–2.50]	2.56 (.02) [2.53–2.59]	2.79 (.04) [2.72–2.87]
Unity/solidarity	3.98 (.02) [3.94–4.02]	4.14 (.01) [4.12–4.16]	4.13 (.01) [4.11–4.14]	4.22 (.01) [4.21–4.23]	4.21 (.02) [4.18–4.24]

Notes: Means are bootstrapped based on 1,000 samples with a 95% confidence interval.

Discussion and Implications for Research and Practice

To our knowledge, this is the first study to conceptually connect Moral Foundations theory with Hazing Motivation. Broadly, our findings reveal that politically conservative fraternity members, because of their inclination towards binding systems of morality, were shown to be more tolerant of hazing, and more motivated to participate in hazing activities that are conceptually aligned to the binding moral foundations—specifically the social dominance and loyalty/commitment motivations. The correlations between political ideology and loyalty/commitment motivation, and social dominance motivation were significant. On the other hand, the relationships between political ideology and the two other hazing motivations (solidarity/unity and instrumental education) were weak or non-existent. These findings provide clear support for our hypotheses and provide

additional validation of the broad applicability of Moral Foundations theory. Political conservatism is closely aligned with the binding hazing motivations most related to the authority and ingroup moral foundations but is not connected to other hazing motivations.

While this is the first study to connect political conservatism with hazing motivation, it is not the first to connect conservatism to a social dominance or authoritarian mindset. Several studies have shown that conservatives are more prone to authoritarianism and are more motivated to limit the liberties of others in defense of the standing social order (Altemeyer, 1996; McCann, 2008; Stenner, 2005). Our study goes beyond these general findings to understand the attitudes of political conservatives within highly salient groups. Their embrace of a top-down, social dominance hazing mindset that reinforces the existing social order is concerning, especially given that, at least in this study, the attitudes of fraternity members skew heavily towards conservatism. Future research should examine these variables within a multi-level modeling framework to understand the impact of groupthink within fraternity chapters that are more politically homogenous.

In examining the extent to which ideology connects with system-justifying beliefs, Jost et al.'s (2008) meta-analysis of research on ideology argued that the acceptance of inequality in systems is a hallmark of political conservatism. The present study provides further support to that argument. The strong relationship between political conservatism and social dominance hazing motivation suggests that political conservatives are significantly more likely to endorse new member activities designed to reinforce inequality within existing systems (in this case, a fraternity chapter). In fact, their analysis found that conservatives are significantly more likely to favorably view fraternities and sororities compared to liberals, as fraternities and sororities are thought of as promoting conventionalism and adherence to social norms. Furthermore, Eibach (2005) found that rapid social change and fear of rapid social decline may cause individuals to report stronger feelings of conservatism. As fraternities on many campuses have seen existential threats lurking in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Abolish Greek Life movement, it is not unreasonable to assume that these threats have caused fraternity members to become more conservative and/or to embrace a social dominance mindset more openly over the last few years. Research by McCreary and Schutts (2021) has shown spikes in recent years among two of the measures found to correlate with political conservatism in the present study: social dominance hazing rationale and social status importance. The extent to which these spikes are connected to changes in political ideology and the extent to which any changes in political ideology are connected to concerns about existential threats are worthy of further study.

In addition to endorsing binding motivations for hazing, politically conservative members also showed an increased propensity to

value social status as part of their fraternity membership, endorse unethical pro-organizational behavior, and disengage from moral self-regulation. Previous research by McCreary et al. (2016) has shown strong connections between moral disengagement and hazing. Still, the present findings suggest that political ideology may serve as a mediating factor in that relationship. Specifically, future research should examine whether political ideology influences the path between moral disengagement and hazing-supportive attitudes in the path model suggested by those authors. Similarly, Cimino (2011, 2013) and McCreary and Schutts (2016) found connections between desired hazing severity and perceived social prestige/social status. The findings of the present study suggest that political ideology should be included in future analyses concerning hazing and social status importance or group prestige, as they suggest that politically conservative members tend to be more attracted to high-prestige groups and that those groups, in turn, engage in more severe hazing (Cimino, 2011, 2013).

The present findings also have tremendous implications for fraternity/sorority practitioners. Understanding the influence that political ideology can have on fraternity hazing and social culture, fraternity/sorority professionals should examine a number of systems. Attention should be paid to the pipeline of students joining fraternities and the processes by which they join. This research suggests that fraternity chapters with a higher concentration of politically conservative members could be more susceptible to problematic member behavior. Therefore, ensuring that systems of joining are connected to a politically diverse group of prospective members is especially important in preventing ideological homogeneity.

These findings also have implications for practitioners engaged in hazing prevention work. Strategies for working with groups that have a higher concentration of politically conservative members should differ significantly than those designed for more politically diverse groups. Based on what we know about moral foundation theory, hazing prevention messages designed to appeal to issues of harm/care or fairness are likely to appeal more to a politically diverse group than to a group with a higher concentration of conservative members. For those more conservative groups (including groups with high social prestige), messages should be adapted to appeal to their heightened moral concerns for group loyalty/commitment and respect for authority. Messages addressing, for example, how to instill group commitment without hazing or how to create a culture of respect without hazing are more likely to resonate with groups that have a higher concentration of politically conservative members compared to messages that only focus on harm/care or fairness.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, survey research is susceptible to potentially low response rates. Survey research also uses self-reported data, and respondents may provide answers that are

socially desirable and do not fully reflect the actual belief held by the respondent (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). We attempted to mitigate these limitations in three ways: (1) by “oversampling” and using a census approach, whereby all undergraduate members of the fraternity were given an equal opportunity to participate; (2) by repeated contact with the respondents through multiple email reminders; and (3) by using a communication strategy before survey launch that was coordinated by the inter/national fraternity partner. All members were given advance notice of a forthcoming survey and encouraged to participate. This helped to validate the researchers in the minds of the potential respondents and assuage any fears respondents might have as to their responses being used against them (thereby triggering a potential desire to offer socially desirable answers).

Second, the study design and sampling methodology do not permit causal inference (Creswell, 2012). We cannot say that political ideology causes the endorsement of hazing motivations or tolerance, nor can we say the opposite, that one’s endorsement of hazing motivations thereby causes them to endorse a political ideology. As the present study only demonstrates that such relationships exist.

Third, the cross-sectional nature of these data does not permit the assessment of any trends or changes in respondents over time (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, we could not address how these respondents’ political and motivational attitudes may change over time.

Fourth, this study was conducted on a sample of predominately white members of historically white men’s fraternities. Future research should examine these relationships within collegiate sororities and culturally-based fraternities and sororities. The relative size of the non-white sample of students in our dataset prohibited a meaningful comparison across race/ethnicity in our analysis. Future research should examine whether or not the relationships between hazing motivation and political ideology are consistent across racial/ethnic groups.

Lastly, despite typically having higher external validity than other designs, correlational designs are more susceptible to internal validity threats than experimental designs because the researcher does not manipulate any of the variables and, therefore cannot fully address or eliminate alternative explanations in the results or confounding variables (Cook & Campbell, 1976; Mitchell, 1985).

Conclusion

Individuals are increasingly using political ideology as a factor in assessing relational needs to attain social belongingness (Jost, 2017). On college campuses, many students continue to attain that social belongingness through fraternity and sorority membership, and membership in those groups has historically been more attractive to those who identify with conservative values. Understanding how political conservatism is connected to not only hazing, but many of

the other social concerns commonly associated with fraternities and sororities (e.g., substance use, sexual assault, discrimination, etc.) is of increasing importance to those studying and working with college fraternities and sororities. This may rankle some in the fraternity/sorority industry, but as noted by Jost (2017), it is important for researchers to examine these ideological differences critically, especially when there is pressure on them to do so uncritically.

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